

To the members of the Public Health Committee:

RE: HB 5537, Section 42 (6)

I am a mother of a daughter who was diagnosed with autism in 1987, and also a Board Certified Behavior Analyst with over 20 years of experience providing Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services to children with autism. My daughter was given speech therapy for 2 years before she received any ABA treatment. ABA turned my daughter from a mute, incontinent, and severely handicapped little girl into the financially independent, college educated, married, wonderful woman she is today. I understand that she is not typical, but she is not alone. With intensive, quality ABA treatment somewhere between 20-50% of children with autism may be able to be as independent as she is. Many children my teams have worked with after I was trained have also been able to achieve this "best-outcome" (non-handicapped) status.

While the speech therapists who worked with her (and the many with whom I have worked professionally through the years) were caring and talented individuals, they were not trained in ABA. The course work and practicum that is needed to become a speech pathologist does not include training in ABA. I am writing to ask you to OPPOSE HB 5537, Section 42 (6). This legislation would allow speech therapists to provide what they may hope is ABA, but without training and board certification in that field they are not qualified to do so. These children and their families deserve a chance for the most rigorously researched and most effective therapy (ABA) for autism spectrum disorders. Allowing untrained individuals to try to provide this reduces the chances that the children will receive the quality services they need by *trained* professionals in the ABA field. The children are very likely to be more handicapped than they would have been with intensive, quality, ABA therapy. This is a waste not only of their futures, but of the taxpayer dollars spent on ineffective treatment, as well as future dollars spent supporting adults who might have been able to become as independent as my daughter is.

Thank you very much for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Audrey Gifford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Audrey Gifford, BCBA, M. Ed.

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